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REVIEW ESSAY

Normativism, Anti-Normativism and Humanist Pragmatism

Stephen P. Turner: Explaining the Normative. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010, pbk. $24.95, hbk. $69.95, 228 pp + index

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Introduction

Stephen Turner's latest book, *Explaining the Normative* (2010), is an incisive and important critique of what he calls "normativism." Turner recognises that the philosophical family that refers to and is enthusiastic about normativity is diverse—for some, even those who would consider themselves members of it, it is really too diverse to be thought of as a unit (e.g. Finlay 2010). Nevertheless, Turner asserts that he has found "a common form of argument underlying various assertions about the necessity or indispensability of the normative, and therefore of normativity" (p. 9). Further, he argues that this common form of argument contains "a large number of genetic defects" (p. 9), it being the aim of the book to reveal them.

In the background here, as Turner himself confesses, is a reaction to his earlier work, *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994). In that book, Turner criticised what was fast becoming (and arguably still is) a popular concept in both philosophy and the social sciences, namely practices. The reaction in question was that the book's arrows were blunt and ineffective, for they failed to target what is at the heart of the concept of a practice: yes, you guessed it, normativity. As Turner himself recounts, following the publication of that book, Joseph Rouse sent him a letter replying that their normative nature immunised practices from Turner's "intent to demolish" them.[1] In this book, Turner sets out to hit the bull's eye, fastening specifically on normativity, and thereby hoping to finally pull the carpet out from beneath the notion of practices.

Given the importance of his claim that normativist sympathies share a core, it will be apt to turn first, in part one of this essay, to Turner's account of it. Following

[1] The lionised language is Turner's; p. vii; for more on their debate see Turner 2007 and Rouse 2007.

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that, in part two, it will be necessary to outline the principal features of Turner's criticism—to those "genetic defects" mentioned above. Turner's book, however, is not entirely negative; indeed, it will be important to look, in part three, at his positive contribution, for in it—much to the surprise of the reader who is fed extensive criticism of the normative in the first five out of six chapters—Turner incorporates some elements of normativity, though in a softer, more modest form than the normativism he attacks.

Turner's criticism of what he characterises as normativism is important; it should help us to tame the excessive ambitions of some versions of normativism. But it is in his attempt to nevertheless find some room for the normative in his own account that the real hope of the book lies. Throughout the first five chapters one often gets the impression that Turner's target is too much of a straw man and thus that his construal of normativity is much too narrow, e.g. his "paradigmatic normativist" is Hans Kelsen, not H.L.A. Hart, who Turner nevertheless calls "a normativist of sorts" (p. 90). It is only when we get to his discussion of Donald Davidson, supplemented by Max Weber, that we see Turner acknowledging a kind of normativity that could meet and mingle with an equally modest naturalism.

Unfortunately, the reader gets only glimpses of this more positive aspect of the book; they are almost drowned out in the intensely critical tone. One could argue that providing a more extensive positive picture is not the book's aim, but that is just the rub. It is one thing to write a book (no matter how good the critical arguments are) that further alienates those working on normativity; it is another to write a book that warns against excessive normativist claims, while nevertheless striving to clear a path towards a fruitful dialogue between normative intuitions and naturalistic ones. I would have liked to have read the book as the second of the two, but there are moments, to be discussed below, when Turner makes this difficult. In part three of this essay, I try to nudge his positive contribution towards a middle path between extreme forms of normativism and naturalism—a path I propose calling humanist pragmatism.

Normativism

Before setting out the core features of normativism that Turner attacks, it will be apt to point out the sheer range of this book, covering as it does many areas of philosophy, including philosophy of the social sciences, legal philosophy, and philosophy of language and mind. Composed of six chapters, together with a substantial epilogue setting out the history of the debate, the book targets such diverse thinkers as Wilfrid Sellars, Peter Winch, Hans Kelsen, Robert Brandom and John McDowell. Turner has targeted some of these thinkers before (e.g. Kelsen in Turner 2002), but never before has he pooled them all together into a sustained attack on a common form of argument. What, then, is this common form?

The common form begins with ordinary facts that can be explained in the ordinary stream of explanation. Within these facts, there is nothing "binding, compelling, or constraining" (p. 9); but the normative does arise from those facts. Once it has arisen, for instance in the form of norms, the normative enters or

establishes a realm of phenomena that "do not directly cause behaviour, but they regulate it normatively, by specifying what is the right way to say something, what obligations one has, what one owes to others as a result of one's meaningful actions, and what is justified for others to do in response to your actions" (p. 9). This realm of phenomena cannot be explained in terms of regularities or by virtue of any causal account. Certainly, the normative facts sit, as it were, on the natural facts—one of the difficulties here is articulating this relationship (e.g. via supervenience)—but they also add something "more", a distinctively normative content, which "cannot be accounted for by the causal or dispositional explanations at hand, such as the causal explanations of learning that account for the dispositions that produce people's expectations" (p. 10). These "special objects" include: "meanings, binding laws, obligations, rules, and so forth" (p. 10).

One of the key characteristics of normativism that Turner points to is its tendency to posit a privileged description of that which needs to be explained, with the effect that the explanation too is privileged. In the case of law, for instance, what needs to be explained—according to the normativist—is whether some rule is genuinely or really law. Whether a rule has this status cannot be ascertained by any account of the beliefs of persons, even "insiders" or participants (legal practitioners); rather, there must be, for instance, a system or set of norms that dictate what is genuinely or really law. First, then, some realm of statuses is posited—genuine or real laws—and then, secondly, an explanatory scheme is posited—a system of norms, say—that the normativist can make explicit and that, when she does so, will show how certain rules attain precisely that status of genuine or real laws. Only this system of norms accounts for the status of some norms as genuine or real norms—not any series or set of beliefs of the practitioners. To attempt to focus on any series or set of beliefs, would be to engage in a sociological rather than a normative study of the law, and thus to "change the subject."

Notice some other features in the above argument. As soon as a realm of genuine or real laws is posited, and thus said to be in need of explanation, so the system of norms that dictates which rules are genuinely and really law becomes necessary—given it functions to secure the existence of the description, the explanation's existence itself becomes secure. Notice, too, that the system of norms in question need not have been articulated; indeed, it is typically argued that it is not. Instead, the system is hidden and needs to be made explicit; it is what exists behind the genuineness of laws, producing them as the result of inferences that can only be justified within that system. It is only thanks to the normativists that the rest of us are able to be enlightened and come to see this enormously complicated set of ultimate or absolute norms that are the conditions of possibility for genuine or real laws, meanings, obligations, and so forth.

It is easy enough to see how such a theory can be translated into a social theory: social life, on this view, is established and maintained by this hidden structure operating in the background, according to which actions are either correct or incorrect, and it is this structure that regulates social interaction, securing its stability and forging the relevant society's identity. Persons who participate in such a social order are taught it and come to internalise it, though they may not be aware of it. This goes not only for "our" society, but also for other societies. Indeed, on

some versions, all human beings share one underlying structure of, say, rationality, and it is only as a result of these universal, *a priori* norms of rationality that any of us are able to make any sense of anyone's beliefs and actions. Sometimes, it is even said that we are human only insofar as we participate in this community of rational beings, i.e. insofar as we feel the force (sometimes referred to as "the normative force") of these norms of rationality, which are always and already there, just waiting to be unearthed and made explicit by the normativist (who is somehow able to access what the rest of us cannot). Less universal forms of this same idea speak of "local normativity", with localised hidden structures (e.g. paradigms in science, or distinct practices) existing behind the beliefs and actions of those said to be members of such communities. Incidentally, this move from universal to local normativity is, says Turner, what characterised the movement from Kantianism to Neo-Kantianism—the debate between them being at the root of contemporary discussions of normativity (p. 67; for a discussion, see also Beiser 2009).

It is useful to remind ourselves here of the scope of Turner's attack. The scope is illustrated well in the following list of "special and puzzling objects" that are posited by normativists:

> …self-authorising principles, rules, understood as tacit rules behind the explicit rules we might invent or propose; mathematical objects, which are not realised in the physical world; objective values; dictates without dictators, the dictates of reason itself; performative utterances which have the property of being able to create a norm, through the act of utterance of a special ritual kind; the nonspatial space of reason; the constraining ideal structure of thought experiments; intentions without intenders, except for supposed collectives, which, despite being wholly analogical, have the power to create and warrant norms; commitments that are unlike ordinary commitments in that they are made without anyone knowing that they were made, in which the person undertaking the commitments could not have understood them as commitments when they made them, or perhaps even afterward. (p. 15)

Conceived of in this broad sense, the attack encompasses everything from Platonic forms, passing through the Hegelian world spirit and Fregean concepts, to the Kelsenian *Grundnorm* and Brandom's score-keeping practices, right through to modern-day discussions of rule-following (as presented, for instance, in Paul Boghossian's work).

To be viable, any attack of this scope must not only pick out general features of a common argument, but also zoom in on specific cases. The central case, picked not only because it is characteristic but also because it is particularly well developed and also dramatic in terms of its main protagonist's acknowledgement of "defeat", is Kelsen's account of legality. Kelsen's case is useful, too, for it highlights one of the central features of normativist arguments—their Achilles heel, if you like—namely the problem of the infinite regress.

To get a grip on what Kelsen was grappling with, it is best to cite his own words:

> When the validity of one norm founds the validity of another norm in one way or another, this creates the relation between a higher and a lower norm.

> A norm stands to another norm as higher to lower, if the validity of the latter is founded on the validity of the former. If the validity of the lower norm is grounded on the validity of the higher norm in that the lower norm is *created* in the way prescribed in the higher norm, then the higher norm has the character of a constitution with respect to the lower norm, since the essence of a constitution is that it regulates the creation of norms. (Kelsen, quoted at p. 75; original emphasis)

The problem here is the rather obvious one: where does the hierarchy of validity end? It is one thing to say, as Kelsen does, that one legal norm's validity can only be inferred from another: for Kelsen, only another valid norm can justify the existence of a further valid norm. But it is another thing to account for how it is that this series of justifications ends, such that—and this is obviously crucial—that it itself is valid (for only then, on Kelsen's view, would it be capable of beginning the series of validity, thereby ultimately establishing a legal system). Here is where, famously or perhaps infamously, Kelsen posited a *Grundnorm* (or a Basic Norm). But the positing of this "regress-stopper" was not so much a solution, as an itch that kept troubling Kelsen for the rest of his life. For what to say about this *Grundnorm*? If it is valid, where does it get its validity from?

Turner expertly traces the history of Kelsen's wrestle with the *Grundnorm*. The punchline—though not a funny one—is that Kelsen ultimately argued that the *Grundnorm* was not really a norm, but rather a fiction—"a cognitive device used when one is unable to attain one's cognitive goal with the material at hand" (Kelsen, quoted at p. 89). Furthermore, it is a fiction that is "accompanied—or ought to be accompanied—by the awareness that reality does not agree with it" (Kelsen, quoted at p. 89). As Turner points out, "Kelsen recognised that without accepting some sort of mystical general will, which was inherently self-authorising and referred to no higher authority, there was no way of generating legal normativity" (p. 89).

Those unfamiliar, or uninterested, in legal philosophy may wonder whether Kelsen's difficulties are unique to the law. According to Turner, nothing could be further from the truth. The same difficulties beset accounts of social normativity (as in Winch) or linguistic normativity (as in Brandom). For instance, according to Turner, and like Kelsen, whereas Winch relies, in his first discussion of the Azande in *The Idea of Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (1958) on the notion of internal relations (among Azande beliefs), he ends up, in the later "Understanding a Primitive Society" (1964), not using the term, saying instead that "the forms in which human rationality expresses itself in the culture of a human society cannot be elucidated *simply* in terms of the logical coherence of rules according to which activities are carried out" (Winch, quoted at p. 108; original emphasis). The problem here was that the only translations available of Azande beliefs showed them (if one applied the internal relations reading) to be contradictory. In order to avoid this conclusion, and not wishing to question the translations, Winch eventually "confessed" (Turner's term) that it must be "our intellectual habits" that press "Zande thought where it would not naturally go" (Winch, quoted at p. 107–108). It is we, said Winch, who were "guilty of misunderstanding, not the Zande" (Winch, quoted at p. 108). There is, in fact, another reading of this

episode—not one that points to, as Turner does in his reading of it, to the inescapability and priority of the natural, but to precisely the lessons Winch took from the encounter, when he reflected further upon it, i.e. his willingness to acknowledge the limitations of his way of making sense of other cultures (indeed, this reading is illustrative of the humanist pragmatism elaborated on in part three). The important point, for present purposes, is to see that the moves Turner identifies in Kelsen are not peculiar to legal philosophy, but affect social philosophy also (to repeat, Winch's internal relations are like Kelsen's *Grundorm*; both are chimeras).

Earlier, in discussing Kelsen, I mentioned that Turner pointed out that Kelsen recognised that in the absence of positing a mystical general will, there was no way of generating legal normativity (based purely and exclusively on normative phenomena). Others have not been so reluctant to posit such general wills. A discussion and critique of these contributions—under the guise of "collective intentionality" (another popular and arguably growing domain of social theory)—is undertaken by Turner in his fifth chapter (this is also the only chapter that has appeared before: Turner 2003). The culprit here is Sellars, who has grown in influence in the last few decades, primarily as a result of the efforts of Brandom and McDowell (both, for instance, are contributors to a recent collection of papers on Sellars; see deVries 2010). Turner neatly traces Sellars's ideas to their Durkheimenian source (see p. 123), but it is not the biographical argument that is of most interest.

A large part of Sellars's appeal to contemporary analytical philosophers was his masterly analysis of ordinary language. Turner, it seems, is immune to his charms. On Turner's reconstruction, Sellars argued that there must be collective intentions because otherwise we could not make sense of such statements as "we disapprove of women smoking, but I don't" (Sellars, quoted at p. 124). If there was no such thing—no such fact—as collective intention, then this would just be a contradiction, for the speaker's "I" would be included in the "we" (the "we" on this reading being simply a list of individual's "I" that happen to share the same attitude). However, if we acknowledge collective intentions as facts, then there is no contradiction, for the speaker's intention is one fact, and the collective intention of the "we" is another. A deep problem—indeed, this is the crux of Turner's critique—is how to establish that this fact, if it is a fact, is shared (Turner argues that this cannot be established, or that attempts to establish it are mysterious). What is important, for present purposes, is to see that part of the normativist strategy can be, and often is, to posit such collective intentions as facts, precisely in order to generate normativity (in the absence of, say, a *Grundnorm* or any other such absolute or ultimate norm). For, on these accounts, such collective intentions generate, for instance, "joint commitments", whether these be joint commitments to walk together (as in Margaret Gilbert's famous example, see Gilbert 1990), or joint commitments to certain norms (such as the norm of truth for belief, see, e.g. Shah 2003) that are said, then, to be inescapable—at least for those who are members of the communities that issue such joint commitments on the back of such collective intentions (what, if anything, determines membership is one of the familiar problems here).

We have reached that word again: inescapability. One of the recurring features of normativism, as portrayed by Turner, is the normativist's reply to any purported

explanation of normative facts, e.g. via the "beliefs" of participants. The reply is articulated well by Turner (throughout, Turner tries to take on the voice of the normativist, and then reply to it—this is a welcome stylistic feature of the book):

> Throughout this treatment of normativism, the discussion of the "social science" approach has violated the basic rules of the game of argument. The use of notions like "belief" is a signal and example of this violation. The term cannot be used meaningfully apart from the terms that connect to it (and connect in a normative, justificatory, way). With such terms, along with intention, meaning, concepts, and so forth, one is in for a penny, in for a pound. There is no taking this and that – helping oneself – from the package of related concepts. The main thing that the concept of belief requires is the most transparently normative philosophical concept of all: rationality. One cannot attribute beliefs on the basis of utterances, or even treat the utterances as meaningful, without assuming rationality on the part of the speaker. And this means assuming intentionality, concept-possession, "concepts" in the normative sense and all the rest of it… What is important is recognising the inescapability of these concepts, and accepting it (pp. 151–152).

Turner has a reply to this reply, but for it, and for other criticisms of normativism, as sketched above, we must turn to the next part of this essay.

Before doing so, I must make one more disclaimer. I have tried as much as possible, in the above, not to challenge Turner's characterisation of the normativism that he targets. There are some normativists who would be happy to be characterised in the way Turner characterises normativism, and among them are those who have made and continue to make strenuous efforts to render less mysterious that which is posited both in the allegedly privileged descriptions and in the allegedly privileged explanations of normative objects. To discuss them—such as, for instance, Wedgewood's recent *The Nature of Normativity* (2007)—would lengthen this essay beyond propriety. It is, however, a pity that Wedgewood's attempt, and other such attempts, were not discussed by Turner.

But the matter of characterisation does not go away so easily. I mentioned, in the introduction, that it is interesting that Turner chooses Kelsen, rather than Hart, as the "paradigm normativist", nevertheless acknowledging that Hart was a "normativist of sorts." What "sort", we might ask? As Turner surely knows, given his citation of Lacey's *The Nightmare and the Noble Dream* (2004), Hart was an avid reader of Weber and based his argument for an "internal point of view" on Weber (though, interestingly, without acknowledging him; see Hart 1961). The contemporary debate over legal normativity, at least in the Anglo-American world, focuses much more on Hart's concept of legal normativity than Kelsen's. Some read it in a way that is friendlier to naturalism than others (see, e.g. Smith 2006, Marmor 2009, Delacroix 2006, Bertea 2009), but either way, Turner's choice of Kelsen, and thus his characterisation of normativism, renders it somewhat off-key in terms of contemporary debates, at least in the legal context.

Also missing from his portrait of normativism is the concept of freedom (the term does not even appear in the index). This is somewhat astonishing, given some of the theorists Turner cites, e.g. Peter Railton, who in an important paper referenced by

Turner (Railton 1999), makes his entire conception of normativity rest on the balance between normative force and normative freedom. Finally, there is but a nod—principally through Christine Korsgaard (1996) and Joseph Raz (1999)—to the study of normativity via practical reason. Certainly, there is discussion (and dismissal) of the viability of Reason with a capital R, but there is a great deal of work here, e.g. most recently by Derek Parfit (the manuscript, originally called *Climbing the Mountain*, is forthcoming, but has been circulating for years amongst philosophers). It is not that Turner's criticisms would not apply to some of these theorists—Parfit, for instance, frustratingly asserts that "we cannot explain what normativity is, or what normative concepts mean" (Parfit 2006, p. 331), which Turner would rightly criticise for mystery-mongering—but it is difficult to evaluate Turner's attack when he does not take into account the detailed proposals made on behalf of practical reason. This is especially so when you consider some of the claims made in this context, for instance, the claim by Parfit that "the disagreement" in the literature on normativity "is not about what the word normative means but about what practical reasoning, at its best, either does or could involve (p. 372; for a recent collection analysing normativity via practical reason see Robertson 2009).

Anti-Normativism

I have already mentioned Turner's complaint that the objects posited by normativists are queer and mysterious; that they trade in mysteries and ask the rest of us to simply "learn to live with it" (this statement, made by Boghossian 1989, is repeated four times in the book, at pp. 12, 14, 30, and 194, as if Turner could not believe anyone could make such a claim).[2] I have also already hinted at a number of other criticisms, such as the positing of a privileged level of description that then calls for a privileged level of explanation. But I want to focus here on another kind of criticism, a form of demystification, introduced by Turner, which also gives us a flavour of the general tenor of Turner's treatment of normativist theories and their objects.

The criticism/demystification in question is what Turner refers to as the "Good Bad Theory" explanation. The concept of Good Bad Theories is first introduced in chapter two, where Turner surveys a series of scientific and social scientific explanations of the normative. After recounting the history and cultural particularity of notions such as truth and even, to some extent, intention (Turner says that "something like intention is perhaps universal", p. 42), Turner says the following (about such and other notions like them):

[2] Expressions of frustration, even within the ranks of normativists, about what Turner refers to as mystery-mongering are by no means rare. Indeed, the term "mysterionism" has been coined to characterise just such a position. Attacks on it, and other forms of normativism that refuse to carry the explanatory burden (e.g. various forms of "quietism"), are arguably growing in number, e.g. see McPherson 2010.

> All of the diverse folk notions mentioned here…have two relevant features: they are taken for granted, believed in, accepted, subscribed to, or used, by people in particular, different, social settings. They work in those social settings to enable the participants to interact with each other, understand each other, and co-ordinate their conduct. None of them is "true" in the sense of being scientifically true. (p. 42)

Up until the last sentence, Turner's explanation is an attractive one. It recognises the pragmatic life of certain notions in certain communities; it acknowledges the hold these tend to have on how persons reflect, judge and interact with others. But then comes the last sentence: we are told that these folk notions—these ways of coping—are not "true" and further "not true in sense of being scientifically true". This is what Turner means when he says these are "Good Bad Theories". The "good" part is that they are "good theories for a particular, unspecified set of purposes in a particular setting" (p. 43). The "bad" part is that they are "inadequate explanations of anything" (p. 43), and, as noted above, that they are not "scientifically true".

I shall look, in a moment, at the applications of this idea to two phenomena—first, to lustral rites in chapter four, and then to group concepts in chapter five—but the following general point can be made presently: is the second sentence, or the "bad" part, really necessary to assert? Is not Turner here doing precisely what he accuses the normativists of doing: claiming priority and inescapability? Recall that for the normativist, on Turner's characterisation, scientific or social scientific explanations are parasitic on normative phenomena; any scientific explanation will, thus, not be normatively true (or it will change the subject, etc.). But is not Turner mirroring the same move by buying into the metaphysical talk? By saying that these folk notions are not really there, not real or genuine scientific facts, Turner is effectively adopting the same meta-theoretical stance as the normativists he criticises. For humanist pragmatism, which is elaborated upon in the third part of this essay, the first feature (the "good" part) is all we need.

Very briefly, then, let us look at these two applications of Turner's Good Bad Theory explanation. In the fourth chapter, Turner takes issue with Winch's criticism of Vilfredo Pareto's (1935) characterisation of baptisms as lustral rites. Pareto had argued the following:

> Christians have the custom of baptism. If one knows the Christian procedure only one would not know whether and how it could be analysed. Moreover we have an explanation of it; we are told that the rite of baptism is celebrated to remove original sin. That still is not enough. If we had no other facts of the same class to go by, we should find it difficult to isolate the elements in the complex phenomenon of baptism. But we do have facts of that type. The pagans too had lustral water, and they used it for purposes of purification (p. 101).

Pareto goes on to find a "rational kernel to this idea", namely that "the human being as a rule has a vague feeling that water somehow cleanses moral as well as material pollution" (p. 101), but accepting this explanation as a participant would, according to Pareto, be "far too simple", hence the "looking for something more complicated,

more pretentious" (Pareto, quoted at p. 101). Turner calls this a "model bit of naturalism" (p. 101). He then elaborates on it himself, adding that the Christian theory of baptism (the explanation internal, as it were, to the Christian practice) is "a complicated but bogus theory—what I have been calling here a Good Bad Theory" (p. 101).

Now Turner does have a point here about Winch's criticism of Pareto, which turned on the idea that since "actions are logically connected to intentions…to be an act, rather than a bit of behaviour…it must be the act intended", such that in this case "the baptising priest intended to baptise…he did not intend to perform a lustral rite" (p. 101). This has the effect of excluding an explanation of the act in question as a lustral rite, on the grounds that it allegedly misdescribes the meaning of the action for the participants. Insofar as the lustral rite explanation is excluded, and insofar as the normativist claims priority, this is indeed problematic, and Turner is right to point this out.

But the same can be said for Turner's (and Pareto's) position: it excludes the normativist explanation; indeed, it does more: it ridicules it in very patronising terms. Turner goes on to say that "in our time, we are typically uncomfortable with…the idea that the Christian version of Holy Baptism actually makes any sense", and that "accepting this language hardly seems to be the sort of thing that anyone should be told is a condition for any project of explanation or understanding" (p. 102). This talk does not sit well with what Turner himself later says about the attractiveness of Weber's approach to these issues: the meaning for the participants was important to take into account; one could explain that meaning in terms of the beliefs of the participants, and how those beliefs and their correlated actions helped participants to achieve certain aims, but no such explanation either required the social scientist to "accept" any language (in the sense of endorsing it, or reifying it) or gave an opportunity to ridicule it. The point here, once again, is that talk of existence, of something really and genuinely being true or real, can be relied on by anyone—whether this be normativism or naturalism, in its more extreme versions—to exclude other explanations, which are better seen as ways of coping and thus, with their own inevitable limitations but also uses. Put differently, the general point is that nobody has a monopoly on talk of existence, truth and reality, and where they think they do, this all too easily leads to the often dismissive and thoughtless exclusion of the views of others. This is not to say there cannot be room for disagreement and evaluation; but it is to say that such disagreement and evaluation can be engaged in without attempting to stand on higher ground by, for instance, claiming metaphysical superiority and priority.

The same difficulties bedevil Turner's attempted demystification of group concepts (in chapter five). Again, Turner makes the point that concepts such as that of a nation or a race "are objects by virtue of the beliefs that surround them" (p. 136). Further, they "serve the purposes of social coordination, of making sense of social experience, justifying authority, justifying claims to speak for others" (p. 137). This is all well and good. However, Turner then goes on to say: "but this does not mean that they are anything but extended metaphors, or that they warrant a general analysis. Nor does it make sense to treat them as true. The idea of a group is not a natural one, but is rather constructed, ideological, and often mythical; group

concepts are perfect instances of Good Bad Theories" (p. 137). Perhaps troubled by the possibility that he may be going too far, he then says, "this is not to say that these theories are not Good Bad Theories *about something*" (p. 137; original emphasis)—a mysterious statement if ever there was one. The question here is why Turner feels compelled to go the extra mile and assert that "it does not make sense to treat" these concepts "as true". Why enter at all into "truth" talk or "existence" talk—if not to claim priority or inescapability?

The problem for Turner is that he contradicts himself. When attacking the normativist, he says that "if the normative model is only a hypothesis, the playing field is levelled. There is no privileged description that necessitates the truth of the normative model" (p. 112). This we can accept, but then does not the same go for the naturalist model, namely, that it is a hypothesis, and not anything that has a monopoly on what is true and real? That Turner appears to think that science has that monopoly is also visible in his claims that the very "normative-natural distinction…is a normative distinction, depending on the definition of norms, or the normative theory, that supplies the normative elements that are supposed to be separated out and used to reconstruct the phenomenon free from naturalistic or causal considerations" (p. 148). But this exclusion of naturalism is hardly a necessary part of the distinction; again, the distinction could be made on purely pragmatic grounds; both are hypotheses that serve different purposes, both are different ways of coping. In fact, Turner uses this argument to exclude the normativists and their intuitions: he says, the distinction "is not an explanatory distinction found in nature or social reality" (p. 148). This is puzzling: it pushes the normativists and their intuitions out of "nature or social reality", which is hardly "levelling the playing field." A normativist need not be an anti-naturalist; the normativist need not claim, as Turner has her claim, that "only the normative exists" (p. 153); here, Turner is embedding into normativist a meta-theoretical attitude that he himself seems to express on behalf of naturalism. This is not to say that there are not some forms of normativism that make the claim that Turner ascribes to them, i.e. they claim superiority and priority over the natural; the point is that there are other forms of normativism that need not make such a claim. As we shall see later, in part three, these are forms that tend to adopt a highly pragmatic attitude to norms, e.g. they do not think of normativity as a domain of explicitly or implicitly existing norms that dictate what is correct and incorrect, but, instead, think of norms as contingent, fragile resources in a space in which evaluations are made. Normativity, on these views, is not exhausted by norms and their mode of existence, but is broadened out to something like 'assessability', i.e. a necessarily pragmatic space for evaluative feelings and the making of evaluations that may or may not be informed by certain norms.

I have already mentioned that the tone in some of Turner's criticisms is disparaging. It is one thing to use fighting words to warn against excessive generalisations on behalf of some philosophical position; it is another to call, for instance, the belief that "the persons in a tribe descended from people who emerged from the earth at some particular hill at some specific moment in history, that they descend from people who had a covenant with God" "literally false and…absurd" (p. 146).

I have barely scratched the surface here in terms of Turner's criticism of his characterisation of normativism. Many of these criticisms are, in this reader's opinion, spot on. For instance, insofar as we associate normativism with "the idea of a set of inferences organised into a system" (p. 110) that exists, hidden, in the background, and is furthermore universal, such that all persons have always and will always share some "deeper set of concepts" (p. 113, a view attributed to McDowell)—these are overblown claims and by no means are they necessary parts of a normativist explanation. Further, they are ideas that, as Turner argues, can be used, and have been used, in an exclusionary fashion—outlawing certain beliefs and practices (see pp. 142–143).[3] These, and other such, criticisms will have to be addressed by those normativists who have upheld them and who wish to continue doing so. But the aptness of these criticisms ought not to make us think that the features Turner has identified are necessary elements of normativism.

Towards Humanist Pragmatism?

I have already noted some of my qualms with Turner's tone. Turner certainly seems to slip, at least occasionally, into an aggressive and dismissive form of naturalism—scientism, we might call it—that parallels the kinds of claims to priority and inescapability in the forms of normativism (let us call them fundamentalism) that he so aptly and ardently attacks. But the same cannot be said for all of the aspects of Turner's positive picture. These more modest aspects emerge most clearly in Turner's discussion of Donald Davidson (in chapter six), and in his endorsement of something like a reconstructed Davidson-Weber picture of normativity, together with some additions of his own. Given space restrictions, I cannot do justice to Turner's analysis here[4]; let me make just some brief points.

The thrust of Turner's reading of Davidson is that we ought to conceive of certain norms of rationality—what are referred to as the "enthymematic elements" involved in interpreting others (such as norms of consistency, coherence and correspondence discussed by Davidson)—not as universal, inescapable, true etc. norms that are always and already there and that necessarily govern or regulate our interactions, but rather as defeasible, fragile, revisable ways of making others intelligible. Hypothetical intelligibility, rather than rule-based correctness or some form of tacit objectivity, is the key. Interpreting someone as if they were consistent and coherent, for instance, is the "counsel of interpretive charity" (p. 159), not some kind of McDowell-like necessary or conceptual conditions for understanding others or some Brandom-like "normative rule-book governing the scoring system underlying linguistic practice" (pp. 159–160). These norms are better conceived, then, as Weber-like "ideal–typical forms of decision-making" that help us to make

[3] In this respect, Turner aptly reminds us of Kant being disciplined for "theological disputation under the guise of philosophy", as when he argued on the basis of his philosophy against "certain religious doctrines of which he disapproved": p. 143; see Hunter 2005 for details.

[4] Turner refers to a forthcoming paper, not yet available, that further elaborates on his notion of "following the thought of another."

others intelligible and are also our only way in which we identify "biases of actual decision-making" (p. 160).

In this way, Davidson and Weber are reconciled. "Davidson's problem," says Turner, "like Weber's, involves the problem of intelligibility, not the problem of supposedly binding norms" (p. 161). To the extent that there is error, this error "is not deviation from rules, and there is no constraint here, no disciplining by group reactions, as in Brandom" (p. 161).[5] Instead, there is "the problem of making oneself understood to other individuals and of understanding other individuals" (p. 161). "Success", not some absolute correctness (or some ultimate authority to assert what is correct and what is not), is what matters. Interpreting others, then, is a "hypothesis-testing epistemic process, in which we employ what we know about ourselves and our beliefs to construct accounts of others' beliefs that make sense of their behaviour" (p. 162).

This approach also answers the normativist objection I referred to in part one of this essay, namely that the naturalist helps himself to terms that are normative through and through. Recall that the central concept here was "rationality"—the one that we allegedly fall back on in the end as, for instance, in our talk of "beliefs" of participants. Here is Turner's answer:

> Rationality is normative, but not in McDowell's sense. It is not the rationality of constraint. Our only constraint is the limit of our capacity to make intelligible. There is no gap between what we can recognise as intentional and meaningful and what we can make intelligible – that is to say, what we can follow, which includes intelligible error. Justification has no special status of the kind accorded to it by Brandom. It is just another piece of behaviour. (p. 165)

Notice the presence of the phrase "what we can follow" in the above. This is a central plank of Turner's own positive contribution. It is set up by the above reconstruction and endorsement of the Davidsonian-Weberian approach to normativity. But it itself also includes its own characteristics. The capacity to follow the thought of another (this is how Turner phrases it) is, in essence, an empathic ability:

> Empathy, in the sense of following the thought of another, explains what is necessary to explain. Empathy is important as an addition to this discussion because it goes beyond the traditional Humean inputs and means of learning. To the extent that we have, and actually employ in ordinary interaction, a primitive capacity for following the thought of another – "primitive" meaning that we can do this "following" the thought of another without constructing a theory or invoking presuppositions – we have a surrogate for the kinds of *a priori* content that Kant thought Hume was lacking, a surrogate without the mysteries of transcendental philosophy. (p. 204)

Learning certainly is vital. It is a causal process, and may involve learning the kinds of folk notions that we saw Turner recognise have effects (pp. 143–147; but that, to

[5] Here, Turner cites and endorses a great paper by Paul Roth (2003), which criticises, *inter alia*, the idea that our judgement of mistakes is necessarily based on our application of pre-existing rules.

recall, he went on to disparage as "literally false and absurd"). At bottom, however, is this primitive capacity to empathise. Human beings, says, Turner "have a very powerful capacity for emulation, mirroring, and therefore empathy" (p. 137)—as many accounts in social neuroscience have shown in recent years. That Turner relies heavily on this research is evident when he says that the notion of following the thought of another "is perhaps best understood in terms of the idea of simulation in cognitive science. And it is this idea", he adds, "that suffices to account for our capacity to make sense of others, to account for intelligibility as distinct from beliefs about rightness" (p. 168).

Empathy is further supplemented by feedback. In interacting with someone, and thus following their thought, we get "feedback from our interactions that reassures us that we are following them sufficiently to say we understand them" (p. 168); there is a constant adjustment and re-adjustment "in the course of interaction" (p. 168). Turner says, somewhat mysteriously, that "the process of feedback cannot be easily reduced to a mechanism" (p. 42), but neither is it a "collective fact that is external and constraining" (p. 168). I agree with him that something like feedback is necessary to build into the picture, but it is unclear, from his few remarks, just what he means by it. Certainly, feedback is necessary first and foremost to ensure that we are speaking of *interaction*, rather than simply one-way traffic of interpretation or intelligibility. Without feedback, the account risks being solipsistic: there is this process we engage in where we use hypotheses, based on knowledge of ourselves, to make others intelligible, but there is no hint as to how the interpreter can revise her own ways of making intelligible. Surely, Turner would not want us to think that when we interact with another, all we ever see are versions of ourselves? This would speak against the viability of the notion of empathy.[6]

The matter is complicated by yet another addition to the picture: the notion of *Evidenz*—a notion popularised in modern philosophy by Franz Brentano and hailing back to the Cartesian notion of self-evidence (p. 170). According to Brentano, *Evidenz* is a judgement about what "anyone whose judgement were evident would judge" (quoted at p. 172); "in short", says Turner, "it is a claim about what others would think—an empathic claim" (p. 173). *Evidenz*, it seems, for Turner, is a kind of "direct understanding" that is "non-inferential and ungroundable" (p. 175), but this kind of understanding is not understanding of intentions or meanings or norms, or the like, but rather "behavioural data." For example, in observing a woodcutter cutting wood, we do not see the "intentions" of the woodcutter; we just see the woodcutter cutting wood directly and non-inferentially, without needing to "employ the language of intention" (which Turner classifies as "a Good Bad Theory of mind") (p. 175). "We "know" or "assume" the man is chopping wood because we

[6] In fact, this raises the interesting question—which unfortunately I can only mention here—as to what exactly Turner means by empathy. For instance, Turner does not discuss the difference between empathy and sympathy. As Jesse Prinz points out, the difference is that in empathy we are obliged to share the feelings of who we observe/interpret/interact with; in sympathy, we sympathise with the feelings of the other without sharing them (as when a parent sympathises with a child who feels scared in the dark, but does not feel the fear themselves): see Prinz 2007, pp. 82–83. Is it empathy or sympathy, then, that Turner has in mind? Given what he says about making others intelligible on the basis of what we know about ourselves, it seems that it is sympathy—but then empathy is a badly chosen term.

can rely, to some extent, on the default setting of empathic projection" (p. 177). We see the man's actions "as meaningful" (p. 175); we recognise it as a gesture "about something" (p. 177); but only as a result of an empathic projection (p. 177), and not, for instance, on the basis of some background normative facts that we have internalised or are committed to. There is nothing more to unearth here in terms of normative facts. We simply observe, and together with feedback we get "as much "objectivity" in this case as there is to be had" (p. 178). Further, it follows that what is empathic is "final in the sense that there is no further explanation of it" (p. 179).

There is some promise in these suggestions, but at this stage, evaluation must be withheld, for they really are too under-developed to allow for a proper assessment. It is difficult, for instance, to evaluate claims concerning "direct, non-inferential and ungroundable understanding" without further elaboration on what this might be (one possibility is something like Shaun Gallagher's 2008 account of direct perception in the intersubjective context). More fundamentally, though, and again on the notion of *Evidenz*, why does Turner think it necessary for persons, in order to interact, to actually agree on where justifications or regresses end? That he believes this can be seen in his claim that "regresses…end at the point that people find that they can follow each other, and that the step in their reasoning is evident. *Evidenz*—that is, ending a regress at a point that the parties each find their way to—is indispensable" (p. 182). This begins to sound eerily like some of the normativist claims Turner attacked earlier in the book, such as those that claim that the sharing of a framework (e.g. of knowledge of norms, even if that knowledge is tacit) is necessary for social interaction. Turner tries to beat off such potential criticisms by saying that he is not talking about something "being evident", but rather about it "seeming evident", or that the two (being and seeming) are "the same thing"; he also says that though being "similarly situated" is necessary for *Evidenz*, this is not the same as "sharing a framework" (p. 183)—but this feels rushed, and more like a convenient philosophical escape route than an argument or an explanation. Again, to repeat the question: why think that in order to get along, to interact, or for social life to flourish, we need to agree on the same thing, or converge on the same understanding, or even feel that it seems that some thing is beyond doubt? Surely we muddle through in a much more heterogonous fashion than that?

These questions concerning *Evidenz* are connected to the little we get by way of an elaboration of how feedback works. To what extent does it make room for the self-transformation of the interpreter? Is even this language—of interpreter and object of interpretation—appropriate for contexts of interaction? Should the concepts here not be more dialogical, less monological?

The difficulties of how to conceive of the normative dimension of social interaction are connected, in the end, to the meta-theoretical attitudes we employ in constructing our theories. These, in turn, are connected to how we relate to others; how we live, or who we express ourselves to be in our relations with others. In his *Meaning and Method in the Social Sciences*, Paul Roth noted that "there are important connections, and connections previously unappreciated, between what is to count as rational and how to live one's life" (Roth 1987, p. 113). This is a profound statement that demands further reflection, and of course, in going on to say what I do I do not claim to be representing Roth's thought (though it is telling that

Roth too ended up defending explanatory pluralism in the social sciences based, to a large extent, on a reconstruction of W.V.O. Quine's pragmatism).

Perhaps we can put matters this way: when considering the normativity versus naturalism debate, I can adopt one side, try to give it the most powerful expression I can muster, defend it against objections, and seek to defeat the other side. This would involve me seeing the other side's intuitions and arguments based on what I understand and what I am attracted to; what seems reasonable and intelligible to me. The interaction in question would then only go so far as a one-way assessment of what I think makes sense—even if I acknowledge that there is no last word, as it were, just my best guess. There is, however, another possibility, more dialogical in tone, which involves trying to see how both positions might need to be tamed, warned against over-generalising or over-blowing their intuitions, and thus how some middle path might be cleared for fruitful dialogues to take place. What would such a dialogue be like? It would be one where, once you begin it, you do not know where you will end up after it; one in which you leave room for changing what you have found intelligible in the past; one in which you and your ways of coping are capable of being transformed. Of course, this middle path need not be—indeed, it should not be presented to be—a path in which everyone must find the same thing evident, or must see what is allegedly there to be seen, and thus one that leads to some reunification of one big happy family, whose members live happily ever after. No, it can lead to much debate and disagreement, based, for instance, on the purposes for which one wants to use a certain constellation of normativist and naturalist intuitions (the Davidsonian-Weberian approach, as reconstructed by Turner, is an excellent example of one such constellation). In other words, the middle path is a path that establishes continuity (rather than a rift) between those who disagree, while nevertheless allowing for a pluralism of explanations that differ based on the needs they meet, or the aims they contribute to. This is the kind of picture I am proposing to call humanist pragmatism.

Transpose this, now, to a picture of the normative dimension of social interaction. We can see this dimension as one that requires persons to share, and be committed to, some common normative knowledge, e.g. knowledge about rules or norms, or other kinds of standards, that dictate what is correct and incorrect. On this account, we go about evaluating each other as doing appropriate or inappropriate things, and we keep score, trusting or distrusting the person in question in the future. Or, we could see this dimension as one in which we coalesce around "what everyone similarly situated would find evident" and find unintelligible anyone who does not. These ways of seeing it are themselves ways of coping, which no doubt serve certain purposes, but neither of them would really capture the humanist pragmatist spirit sketched above. A humanist pragmatist would feel uncomfortable with either account, for they would not express what she herself espouses at the meta-theoretical level. Perhaps, then, and as hinted in part two above, this humanist pragmatist would conceive of that normative dimension in terms of *assessability*; this would not be a space where what is correct or incorrect, appropriate or inappropriate, is always and already there, as it were, just waiting to be revealed and applied properly. Rather, it would be a space in which persons interact, making assessments but without needing to assign them a status of

finality; a space in which the meta-evaluation of first-order assessments is always possible (there is no problem of infinite regress here, for the decision to go to the next level is a pragmatic one). Certainly, in the swim of daily life it is impossible to go around negotiating how things are to be evaluated; we need something, even provisional, to hold on to that facilitates co-ordination in a quick and economic fashion. The point is that when this space is opened up, we make assessments, but not by reference to anything that "does not have any further explanation", that is "primitive", "genuinely real" or "really true", and so on, but just something that we have gotten used to using as a way of coping (as noted above, this includes our philosophical or social scientific theories). The things we hold onto, then, are revisable ways of coping, habitual ways of relating to others, some of which we learn from our family and friends, some from further abroad (and, indeed, we learn some of them through our incredible capacity to simulate others). We interact not because or insofar as we make each other intelligible on our own terms, but because or insofar as we are able and willing to be transformed by the encounter with the other, becoming increasingly aware of the inevitable limitations of our ways of coping (this recalls the alternative reading, mentioned above, of Winch's turn-around, in 1964, on his previous treatment of the Azande). This is but a sketch, of course—but it gives some flavour as to what a humanist pragmatism, at the meta-theoretical level, might say, at the first order level, about the normative dimension of social interaction. It is a picture that includes normativist elements, but by no means in an anti-naturalist tone: it strives for a constellation between these intuitions.

I mentioned earlier that aspects of Turner's positive contribution nudge us towards humanist pragmatism. We have seen, in this part of the essay, that Turner does end up making room for the normative, though in a way that is softer, more modest than the forms of normativism he criticises. We have also seen, in part two of this essay, how on occasion Turner's criticism lapses into an immodest form of naturalism (which I have called scientism), one that claims priority for scientific explanations. Although Turner does not explicitly discuss modest or immodest versions of naturalism, his willingness to nevertheless include a softer form of normativity, of the Davidsonian-Weberian kind, into his account, suggests that modesty is possible—and on both sides (for other more recent efforts to articulate a softer form of naturalism, see De Caro and MacArthur 2004, 2010). For this reader's money, the reconstruction of Davidson, and the use made of Weber, are indicative of a rapprochement between two sides that otherwise find it difficult to talk to each other. We need to hear more from Turner as to his "empathy plus feedback and *Evidenz*" as to whether this is the most promising way to further elaborate that rapprochement. What is most significant is that, at his best, Turner opens the door for a much friendlier and more fruitful future debate.

Conclusion

There is one elephant in the room that I have yet to mention in this essay: the practice of explanation itself. Surprisingly, in a book entitled *Explaining the*

Normative, and one in which so much emphasis is placed on explanatory value, very little is said about explanation. But there is another question that we can raise about the identification of science or social science with explanation, and the elevation of explanation to a superior tribunal. In an unjustly neglected book, *Explanation in Social Science* (1963), Brown noted that "most work in the social sciences, like most work in history and in the natural sciences, is not directly concerned with the furnishing of explanations" (p. 47). Even if it "may well be true," he added, "as is so often said, that the tasks of any empirical science are to explain, to predict, and to apply", we would still need to recognise that "these tasks are embedded in a workload that may be referred to as identification, classification, description; and measuring and reporting as well" (p. 47).

To this list, we can add more. The practice of science is a human practice that, in what it chooses to explain, describe, classify, identify, describe, measure and report, also expresses what the scientist, and their laboratory or school, feels is important to focus on. Further, those activities themselves are done in ways that reflect on the values the person performing them espouses. We need not think, here, of salience or values as something mysterious. Under the guise of humanist pragmatism, these are simply expressive of the ways we relate with others and how we cope with what we encounter. Of course, we do not always adopt them in a self-reflective manner; sometimes we just perform them, mindlessly, taking on what those before us did. Then, assisted by openness, we depend on others to tell us how what we do, and how we do it, affects what they feel. Turner has done contemporary philosophy and social science a great service by holding up a mirror to some forms of normativism; he has given it the best gift one can: genuinely struggled with it, tried to give it voice, and then said how he feels about it. He has also, in his best moments, helped create a clearing where more fruitful dialogue between normativism and naturalism can take place. Let us wait and see whether those who identify with normativism can come to meet him there.

Let me add one final comment: there is a question that could be raised here concerning whether it is appropriate to discuss Turner's critique and positive contribution from the perspective of a debate between normativism and naturalism. After all, some might argue that Turner could also be seen, and perhaps better understood, as attempting to move beyond that debate. This is a perceptive remark, but the problem is that Turner's way of moving beyond the debate is questionable: it involves attributing to normativism a view that claims priority and superiority over the natural. I have tried to argue that we can move beyond the debate, and set up a dialogue, by incorporating softer forms of both the normative (which involves making room for a kind of normativity without inescapable norms) and the natural into different explanatory constellations that can serve different purposes. Adding 'humanism' to this pragmatic pluralism means that attention is paid to how engaging in scholarship is another manifestation of how we relate to each other, how we live together. 'Moving beyond the debate', then, is not a matter of dismissal and exclusion, but of finding ways to work together. Finally, moving beyond the debate in this way may require dropping the kind of dismissive and exclusionary talk of the 'genuinely real', the 'really existing', the 'certainly true.'

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